

Is It Rational to Believe in Anything Other Than Science?

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Outline

- 1. Naturalism in Science**
- 2. Naturalism in Culture**
- 3. What Naturalism misses**

PREVIEW



Outline

1. Naturalism in Science
2. Naturalism in Culture
3. What Naturalism misses

What is Naturalism?

Matter, Energy, + Nothing = Everything

(Is this the same as “atheism”?)

**Scientists often practice
“Methodological Naturalism”**

**“For the purposes of this
experiment, I’m going to assume
only natural forces at work.”**

**Scientists often practice
“Methodological Naturalism”
(but why?)**



**Scientists often practice
“Methodological Naturalism”
(but why?)**



**What do we do if naturalistic
explanations can't get the job done?**

The Origin of Life



The Origin of Life (according to Harvard)



Premise 1: Life began.

Premise 2: Only naturalistic explanations are allowed.

Conclusion: Therefore there is a natural explanation for the origin of life.

(Uh oh. This is not based on data. We may have defined ourselves out of the right answer!)

“Give us more time!”

SCIENTIFIC DATA



A diagram illustrating the components of scientific data. A horizontal bar is divided into two sections: a light blue section on the left and a dark blue section on the right. The text 'SCIENTIFIC DATA' is written in white across the bar. Below the bar, a horizontal line with two vertical drop lines connects the two sections to the text 'Naturalistic explanation' and 'Explanation unknown' respectively.

Naturalistic
explanation

Explanation
unknown

Outline

1. **Naturalism in Science**
2. **Naturalism in Culture**
3. **What Naturalism misses**

“But people don’t normally think about the origin of life. How does this topic affect my daily life and how I interact with others?”



“Have you ever really thought about ribosomes?”

The dominant cultural worldview

(common in media, government, academia, urban centers)

- A. Scientism
- B. Individual autonomy
- C. Religious belief as therapeutic

A. Scientism

- When I do science, I'll assume naturalism.
(Methodological Naturalism)
- The only way I can know anything is through science.
(Scientism)

A. Scientism

Scientism says:

- Scientific testing is the only path to reliable, objective knowledge
- Science only deals with the natural world
- Thus, natural world is all that you can know anything about.

“I only believe things based
on evidence!”





C O S M O S

A SPACETIME ODYSSEY

With Astrophysicist and Host Neil deGrasse Tyson
and Executive Producer and Writer Ann Druyan



Only beliefs that can be demonstrated through scientific experiments are trustworthy.



Can you demonstrate that statement through scientific experiments?



Why do people believe this?

“If you can’t demonstrate your belief objectively (using science), then you can’t expect others to believe it.”

B. Individual Autonomy

Since objective values, morality, purpose cannot be demonstrated from science...

Each individual has the right to define their own identity, sense of meaning, and sense of the “good life.”

“At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”

– Anthony Kennedy, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*

B. Individual Autonomy

“The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific rights that allow persons, within a lawful realm, to define and express their identity....

The right to personal choice regarding marriage is inherent in the concept of individual autonomy.”

Obergefell v. Hodges

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B. Individual Autonomy

Individual Autonomy logic:

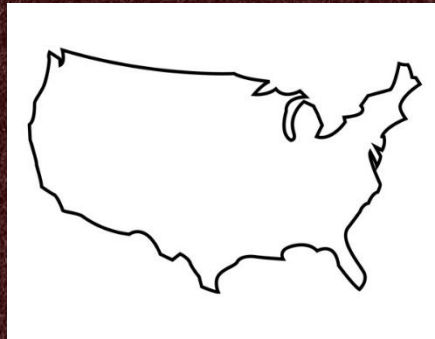
1. Science can't define "should"
2. Science is the only way we can objectively know anything
3. Therefore no one objectively knows how we "should" live.
4. Then, everyone has the right to determine "should" statements for themselves

Conclusion: You should not tell others to conform to your sense of right and wrong.

What's the problem?

B. Individual Autonomy

But if we just base our society on science alone, isn't the right to individual autonomy our only default option?



“Of course we must avoid harming others, but any decision about what harms others will be rooted in (generally unacknowledged) views of human nature and purpose.”

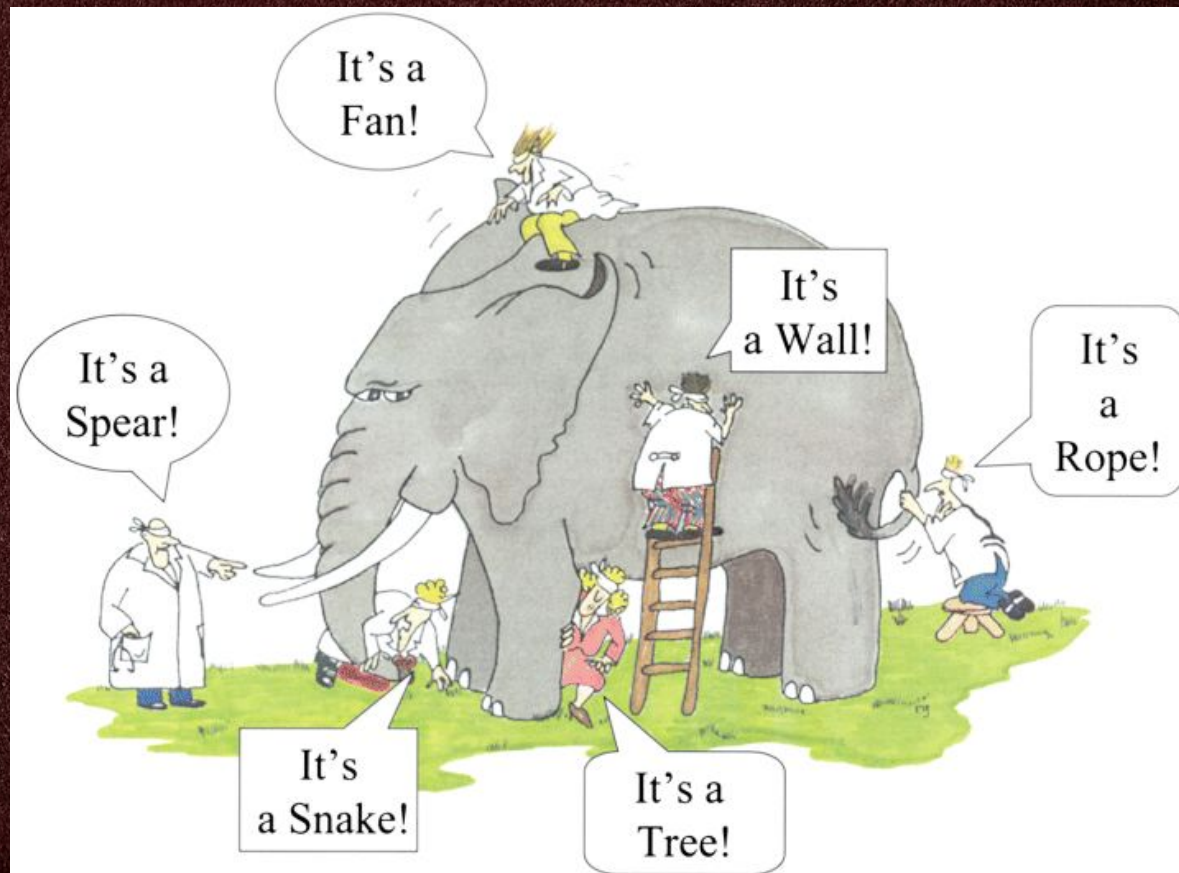
Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God*

C. Religious belief as Therapeutic

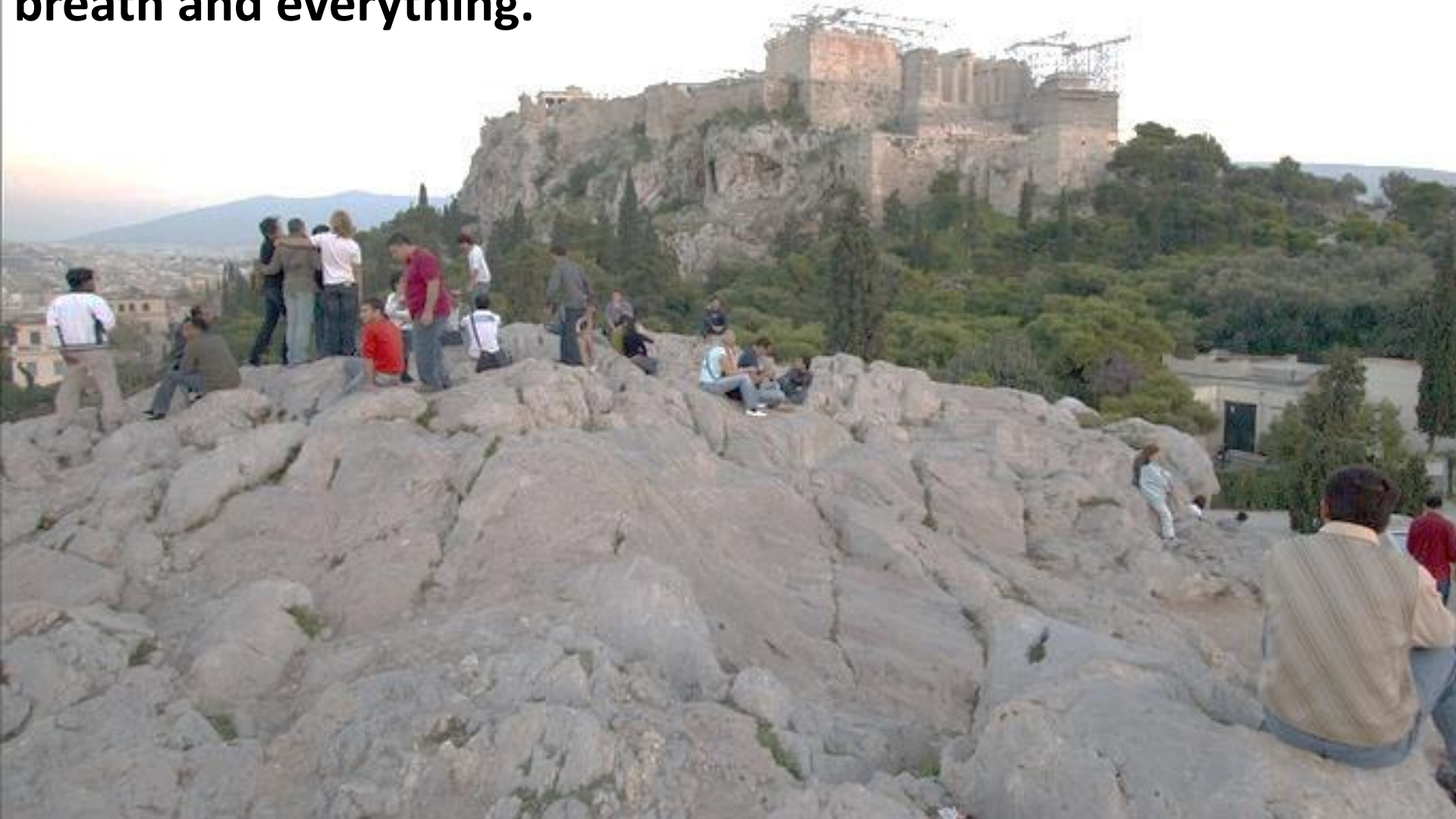
- Religions are man-made efforts to create meaning
- Believe whatever is helpful and meaningful to you
- Objective religious claims are oppressive



The elephant illustration



Acts 17: ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.



What's the worldview behind this statement?

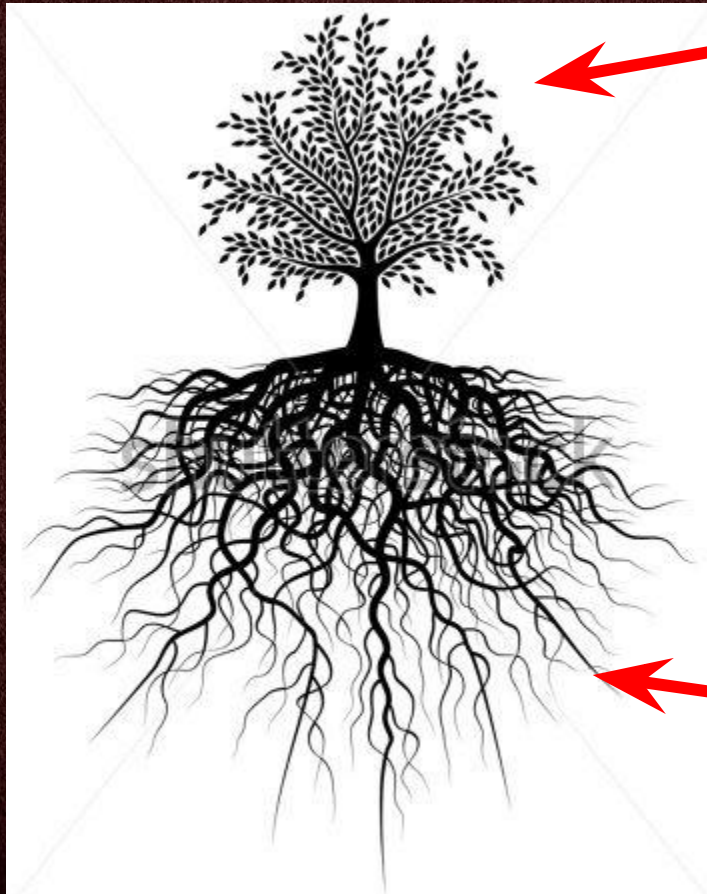
"I don't see how Jesus is relevant to me."

"Hidden beneath this feeling is the very modern American belief that the existence of God is a matter of indifference unless it intersects with my emotional needs."

– Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*

(group discussion)

**Ask other leading questions to
determine what the root of their belief is**



Arguments on Facebook

Worldview issues

Summary:

Key weaknesses for our culture's worldview

- Scientism is self-defeating
- The “right” to individual autonomy is self-defeating.
- The claim that “religious truth claims aren’t really objective” is itself objective.



Outline

1. **Naturalism in Science**
2. **Naturalism in Culture**
3. **What Naturalism misses**

But Science is Advancing all the time, right?

“God of the gaps”

Gap in our ability to
explain data will shrink
over time



The diagram features a horizontal rectangle divided into two equal halves. The left half is light blue and contains the text 'SCIENTIFIC DATA' in white, bold, uppercase letters. The right half is dark blue. Below the rectangle, two brackets extend from the center of each half down to explanatory text. A blue arrow points from the text 'Gap in our ability to explain data will shrink over time' to the boundary between the two halves of the rectangle.

SCIENTIFIC DATA

Naturalistic explanation

Explanation unknown.
Theists insert “God
explanation” here

I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world. – Richard Dawkins



**BREAD GOES IN,
TOAST COMES OUT**



**YOU CAN'T EXPLAIN
THAT!**

SCIENTIFIC DATA

Origin of Universe

Beauty

**Applicability of Math
to Universe**

Moral Norms, Human rights

Origin of Physical Laws

Universe is intelligible

SCIENTIFIC DATA

Cognitive Reliability

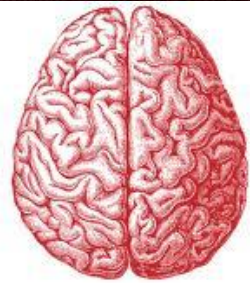
Subjective Consciousness

Reliability of the Mind

- What kinds of assumptions do I need to make in order to be a Scientist?
 - Sense perception is reliable
 - Universe is understandable and orderly
 - My mind is reliable
- Why do I get to make those assumptions?

If naturalism is true, then what about my mind?

- My “mind” is just the biochemical reactions going in my head
- Is my subjective, first-person conscious experience and sense of self actually real?
- Is my sense of rational, logical thought and argumentation legitimate?





IN MODERATE TO SEVERE RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)

Get an RA symptom profile
to show your doctor ▶



Prescription Enbrel® (etanercept) is taken by injection.

[Prescribing Information](#) [Medication Guide](#)[Important Safety Information](#)

INDICATION

Moderate to Severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)
ENBREL is indicated for reducing signs and symptoms.

The Brain: The Mystery of Consciousness

You exist, right? Prove it. How 100 billion jabbering neurons create the knowledge--or illusion--that you're here

By Steven Pinker | Monday, Jan. 29, 2007



1.3k



97



29

[Read Later](#)

The young woman had survived the car crash, after a fashion. In the five months since parts of her brain had been crushed, she could open her eyes but didn't respond to sights, sounds or jabs. In the jargon of neurology, she was judged to be in a persistent vegetative state. In crueller everyday language, she was a vegetable.

So picture the astonishment of British and Belgian scientists as they scanned her brain using a kind of MRI that detects blood flow to active parts of the brain. When they recited sentences, the parts involved in language lit up. When they asked her to



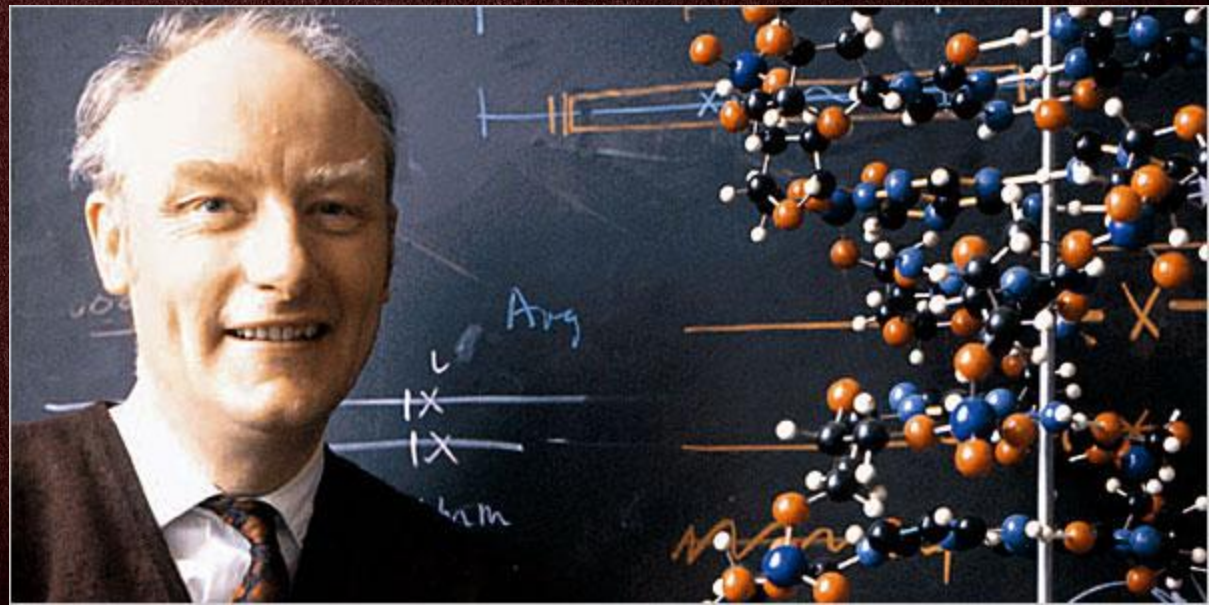
Illustration for TIME by Istvan Orosz

“Your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

-Francis Crick

The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search For The Soul

Reductionism

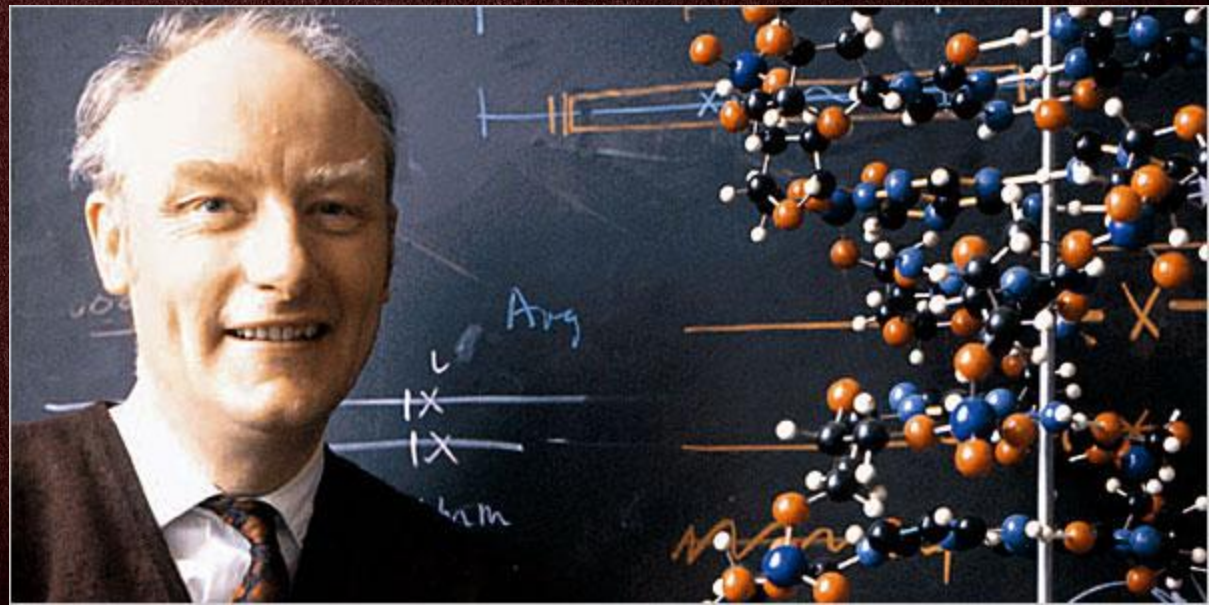


“My joys and my sorrows, my memories and my ambitions, my sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.”

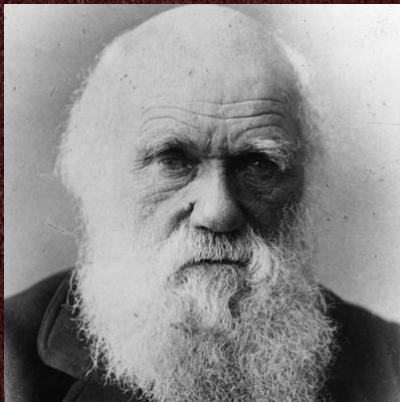
-Francis Crick

The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search For The Soul

Reductionism



“With me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”



Charles Darwin

Do we have to be Reductionist?

- Even if naturalism is true, perhaps consciousness (and rationality) is an **emergent** property that **supervenes** upon the neural network



Beliefs come from natural selection, not from rational thought



“Religion has the hallmarks of an evolved behavior, meaning that it exists because it was favored by natural selection....it was wired into our neural circuitry before the ancestral human population dispersed from its African homeland.”

Nicholas Wade, NYT

What's the problem?

Beliefs come from natural selection, not from rational thought



“Everything I believe has the hallmarks of an evolved behavior, meaning that it exists because it was favored by natural selection....it was wired into our neural circuitry before the ancestral human population dispersed from its African homeland.”

Nicholas Wade, NYT

The consequences of Naturalism

- No “should” statements
- No meaning
- **No cognitive reliability**
- **No first-person subjective experience**
- **No science?**

(Not all atheists are naturalists!)

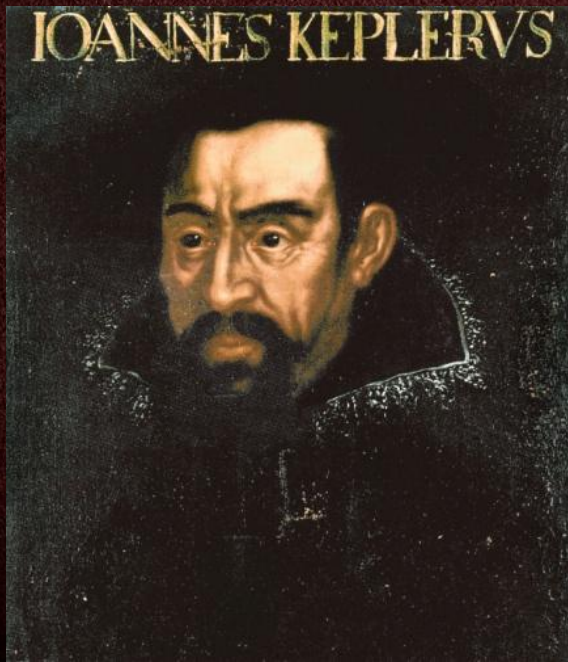
The Scientific Mind and Atheism

- What kinds of assumptions do I need to make in order to be a Scientist?
 - Sense perception is reliable
 - ~~– Universe is understandable and orderly~~
 - ~~– My mind is reliable~~

The Scientific Mind and Christianity

- What kinds of assumptions do I need to make in order to be a Scientist?
 - Sense perception is reliable
 - Universe is understandable and orderly **because God made the universe**
 - My mind is reliable **because God made my mind!**

“Those [scientific] laws are within the grasp of the human mind. God wanted us to recognize them by creating us after his own image so that we could share in his own thoughts.”



Johannes Kepler, 1571 - 1630



“The diversity of the phenomena of nature is so great, and the treasures hidden in the heavens so rich, precisely in order that the human mind shall never be lacking in fresh nourishment.”

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Texas A&M Christian Faculty Network,
cfn.tamu.edu
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What worldview commitments are behind these statements?

1. "I don't see how Jesus is relevant to me."
2. "Christianity seems so unscientific and old fashioned."
3. "Yeah I am a Christian, but I don't go overboard with it. I'm not an extremist."
4. "If it's not hurting anyone, I should be able to do whatever I want with my body."
5. "Religion is based on faith, but science is based on evidence."

What about us?

**Where do we find ourselves
soaking up an American
cultural worldview?**



(group discussion)

Brainstorm

- Desire for human approval – “I want people to think I’m smart.” Academic accomplishment and pedigree as ultimate
- “What job will be fulfilling to me?”
- Superstitious, karmic views – If I’m good, good things will happen to me
- Preoccupation with fame and attention
- Narcissism – I am the star of my own movie.
- Entertainment, input just bounce off of me, don’t harm me.
- Greed – low view of community needs. Competitive in regard to wealth / success / beauty
- Individual-centric hopes and dreams – the emphasis is on defining your ideal path that maximizes meaning for you.

SCIENTIFIC DATA

The Programming of Life

How does Programming work?

Code □ Compiler □ Machine Language

Programming Languages (C)

Code – written in C
programming language

```
S=0;  
x=0.1  
for i = 1:10  
    S=S+(x^i)/i!  
end
```

Compiler (Translator)
Produces
machine-language
executable program

Computer executes
program

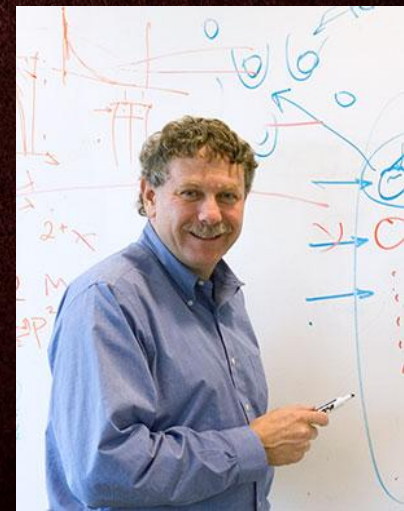
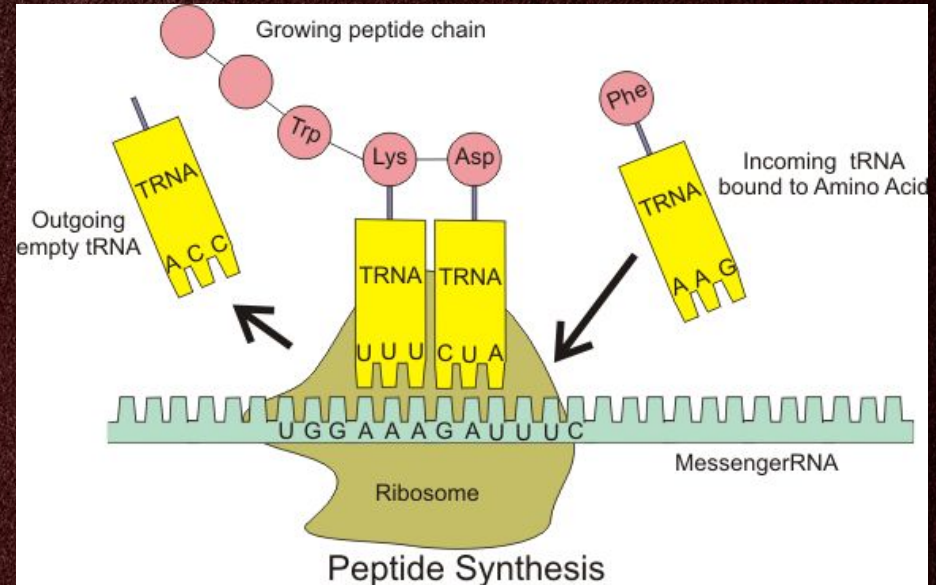
```
010100010010010111010  
100100111101101000110  
011010101000100111
```


Programming Languages (DNA)

DNA code (written in A, G, T, C) copied to mRNA

Compiler (Ribosome) reads mRNA and produces protein with corresponding sequence of amino acids

Proteins go out into cell and perform function



**As you discuss with others, don't focus
on “symptom” issues.**

Focus on “worldview” issues